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ABSTRACT

The differences between aggressiveness and assertiveness were examined using the Interpersonal Behavior Survey (IBS), a 136-item self-report questionnaire which was developed to distinguish between assertive and aggressive behaviors. Item level factor analysis was used in scale construction. Results indicated that: (1) the correlation between the aggressiveness scale and the assertiveness scale was -.05 in a sample of 402 community residents; (2) no substantial correlations existed between these scales in studies of over 30 groups; and (3) correlations of IBS scales with scales on seven personality inventories supported the discriminant validity of the assertion and aggression scales. (Author)

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Abstract

Can Assertiveness be Distinguished from Aggressiveness Using Self Report Data?

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The confusion of aggressiveness with assertiveness pervades the theory and practice of assertiveness training. The Interpersonal Behavior Survey (IBS) is a 136 item self report questionnaire which was developed to distinguish between assertive and aggressive behaviors. Item level factor analysis was used in scale construction.

The correlation between the aggressiveness scale and the assertiveness scale was -.05 in a sample of 402 community residents. No substantial correlations have been found between these scales in studies of over 30 groups. Correlations of IBS scales with scales on seven personality inventories support the discriminant validity of the assertion and aggression scales.

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Summary

Can Assertiveness be Distinguished From Aggressiveness Using Self Report Data?

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Americans mix the concepts of assertive and aggressive behavior in our everyday speech and thought. Although violence is generally condemned, aggression is considered a desirable characteristic. The help wanted sections of our newspapers contain advertisements for salesmen who are "sharp and aggressive" (Oracle, March 30, 1976). Aggression is widely admired in sports, and some colleges even give an award to their team's "Most Aggressive Player."

These concepts are also confused by psychologists who have popularized assertiveness training. George Bach has encouraged couples to stay together through the technique of fair fighting (Bach & Wyden, 1968) and sees fight phobic behavior as being the cause of much marital unhappiness. Assertiveness training, according to Rathus (1972), should help a person to become "generally more outgoing and aggressive." Winning through intimidation has become a popular goal for assertive people.

Several self report instruments have been developed for use in assertiveness training and research on assertive behavior. The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (Rathus, 1973) is probably the most widely used of these scales. The first item on this scale reads, "Most people seem to be more aggressive and assertive than I am." Furthermore, the score on this test correlated more with ratings of

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aggressiveness (.54) than with ratings of assertiveness (.34). The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule is a measure which confounds assertive and aggressive behavior.

What is the relationship between assertive and aggressive behavior? Wolpe (1958) who developed the original premises of assertiveness training, originally defined assertiveness as "not only more or less aggressive behavior, but also the outward expression of friendly, affectionate, and other nonanxious feelings (p. 114)." More recently he has made a distinction between the two concepts (Wolpe, 1973). Aggression is defined by Wolpe as "oppositional behavior which is socially reprehensible," while assertive behavior is "socially acceptable expression of personal rights and feelings" (Wolpe & Lazarus, 1966, p. 38). Wolpe also delineates two subtypes of assertive behavior: oppositional or hostile (the expression of anger, displeasure, or disagreement); and commendatory (the appropriate expression of positive feelings such as affection or praise).

This research project was initiated to discover if assertive and aggressive behaviors could be distinguished through self report items, and to explore subclasses of assertive and aggressive behaviors.

Assertive behaviors are goal oriented behaviors which further the interests of the individual or express the individual's feelings or opinions but at the same time take into account the rights of other people. Aggressive behaviors are those behaviors which have as their intention the harming or injuring of another person or fail to acknowledge the rights of others.

Using these definitions as guidelines, 447 items were developed. These items were adapted from items in existing personality inventories or were written to sample behaviors cited in the literature on assertiveness training as assertive, non-assertive, or aggressive behaviors. All the items were written in the present tense and describe current feelings, attitudes, behaviors, and self

evaluations.

The initial item pool was administered to students in a seminar on assertive behavior. They were asked to evaluate each item and comment on ambiguity, awkwardness of expression, overlap with other items, and to classify the behavior sampled as assertive, aggressive or mixed. A final item pool of 168 items was chosen based on these comments. These items were edited by a sixth grade teacher to assure that they were written simply enough for people with a sixth grade reading level. Several women identified with campus feminist causes also reviewed the items to eliminate sexist expressions.

An item analysis sample of 75 males and 75 females was selected from several groups which had been tested. The group was comprised of one-third university students, one-third junior college students, and one-third community residents. The average age of the university students was approximately 24 years; the average age of the junior college students was 27 years. The composite sample was selected to avoid basing the scales on the responses of middle class college sophomores. Although the group is not a truly representative sample of the North American population, it is older, poorer and less well educated than samples used in most scale construction efforts. It was hoped that scales developed on this group would better represent the assertive and aggressive behaviors of the general population than would scales based on a college sample which might embody middle class conceptions of these behavior classes.

The 168 items were grouped into three categories according to their content: assertive items, aggressive items, and impression management items. These groups of items were refined through internal consistency item analysis procedures modeled on Campbell and Fiske's (1959) multitrait-multimethod matrix. Using item remainder coefficients, the Denial scale was developed from the impression management items. All other items were then correlated with the Denial scale.

All items which had been written to sample assertive or aggressive behaviors but which had significant correlations with the Denial scale were eliminated from the item pool. This step was designed to minimize the effect of a social desirability response set on assertiveness and aggressiveness scale variances.

Item remainder coefficients were also computed for the items in both the assertive and aggressive item pools. Any item without a significant correlation with its appropriate scale total was deleted. Finally, each item was correlated with the score on the other content scale. If that correlation was significant, the item was also deleted. These steps yielded a 55 item Assertiveness General Rational scale and a 38 item Aggressiveness General Rational scale. In summary, internal consistency item analysis retained items which were: (1) correlated with items in the content domain they were written to sample, (2) uncorrelated with items in the content domain they were not supposed to be sampling, and (3) uncorrelated with a measure of the social desirability response set.

The sub-classes of assertive and aggressive behavior were identified through item level factor analysis procedures on the 136 items surviving the internal consistency item analysis. A principal factor method factor analysis was carried out in a sample of 542 subjects, with the resultant factors rotated to a varimax solution. The same procedure was carried out on a second sample of 337. The factor loadings on the rotated factors from the two analyses were then correlated with each other. Eight factors were found which correlated greater than .85 with a factor from the other analysis. Items were chosen to form six factor scales based on their loadings on the factors. An insufficient number of items had loadings on two of the factors so scale development was impossible in these cases.

The six factor scales are:

1) Hostile Stance - a measure of an antagonistic orientation toward and an attitude of distrust of other people.

2) Expression of Anger - an indication of the tendency to lose one's temper

and express one's anger in a direct, forceful manner.

3) Self-confidence - an expression of positive attitudes about one's self and attendant self assurance.

4) Initiating Assertiveness - behaviors relating to leadership, starting things, and taking an ascendant role.

5) Defending Assertiveness - a measure of behaviors related to standing up for one's rights.

6) Frankness - the willingness to clearly communicate one's true feelings and opinions even though these expressions may be unpopular or may cause a confrontation with others.

The factor scales measuring aggressiveness are Hostile Stance and Expression of Anger. The Self-confidence, Initiating Assertiveness, Defending Assertiveness and Frankness scales sample assertive behaviors.

All of the scales which were derived through internal consistency item analysis and item level factor analysis have adequate internal consistency and stability. Coefficient alphas for the scales range from .66 to .90 with a mean of .77. Three week test-retest correlations range from .65 to .88 with a mean of .78.

The six factor scales clearly sample either assertive or aggressive behaviors. The items on each scale all come from either the assertive content item pool or the aggressive content item pool. This consistency is impressive when the factor analysis varimax rotation procedure is considered. The computer was blind to the content of the items which loaded on the factors. The loadings of the items on the factors were determined entirely by the relationships between the item responses of the subjects. The investigators had hoped there would be a clear distinction of factors by the content of the items with high factor loadings, but would never have been so bold as to predict the 100% factor content consistency

which emerged from the data analysis.

The separation of self report of assertive behaviors from aggressive behaviors is seen in the correlations between the various scales. The Assertiveness General Rational scale correlates -.05 with Aggressiveness General Rational scale in a male sample of 201 community residents and -.04 in a female sample of 201 community residents. In over 30 different groups which have been tested to date this same relationship has generally been found. The observed correlations between these two scales have ranged from .59 to -.48. All of the larger correlations have been from small samples of under 20 people. The .59 value, for instance, comes from a sample of 12 women married to career Air Force officers. The strongest relationship between these scales in samples larger than 20 is .26. As the groups become larger the value of the correlation approaches zero.

The correlations between the factor scales are similar. The correlations between the scales measuring sub-classes of assertive behavior or between scales measuring sub-classes of aggressive behavior are typically in the .30 - .60 range. The correlations between scales measuring assertive behaviors with those measuring aggressive behaviors generally fall in the -.10 to .30 range. Visual inspection of these correlational patterns in the more than 30 samples reveals two clearly distinguishable clusters of correlations, one of assertiveness scales and one of aggressiveness scales. Since there is no item overlap between any of the factor scales these clusters are not due to artificial constraints on the data.

The scale which has been found to have the highest correlations with scales in the other behavior class is the Frankness scale. Even here the majority of correlations between the Frankness scale and the aggressiveness scales are below .30.

A factor analysis of the factor scale scores was done in a sample of 1126 college students. The principal factor with iterations method with rotation to

a varimax solution was used. Two factors emerged which clearly mirror the assertiveness - aggressiveness content dichotomy. The first factor has loadings of .59 to .81 from the assertive factor scales and .01 from the Hostile Stance scale and .00 from the Expression of Anger scale. The second factor has loadings of .57 from the Hostile Stance scale, .64 from the Expression of Anger scale and no loading greater than .28 from any of the assertiveness scales.

Comparisons with scores on seven personality inventories also support the discriminant validity of the assertiveness and aggressiveness scales. These inventories include the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, the California Psychological Inventory, the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory, the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule, the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, the Tennessee Self Concept Scale, and the Interpersonal Check List. The assertiveness scales have moderate to high correlations with the positive behavior characteristics measured by these inventories and non-significant to moderate negative correlations with scales measuring pathological or negative behaviors. The opposite pattern is seen in the correlations between the aggressiveness scales and the scales on these inventories.

The Edwards Personal Preference Schedule is the only one of these inventories with scales measuring both assertive and aggressive behaviors. The General Assertiveness Rational scale correlates .63 with the Dominance scale and .22 with the Aggression scale in a sample of 44 graduate students. The General Aggressiveness Rational scale correlates .21 with the Dominance scale and .57 with the Aggression scale.

The various analyses of the assertiveness and aggressiveness scales demonstrate the ability of self report data to distinguish assertive from aggressive behaviors. It is hoped that these scales will be found to have value in research on assertive behavior and assertiveness training.

The measurement of sub-classes of assertive behavior may be as important an achievement as the distinction between assertive and aggressive behavior classes. The Defending Assertiveness scale appears to be measuring Wolpe's (1973) oppositional or hostile assertiveness. His commendatory type of assertiveness was not found in the item level factor analysis even though a reasonable number of items sampling these behaviors were in the item pool.

The four factor scales which have been developed do not represent all possible sub-classes of assertive behavior. A larger range of item content could easily yield additional stable assertiveness factors. The existing scales have already proven to yield valuable data in research projects and clinical application.

Reference Note

1. For a copy of the manual of the Interpersonal Behavior Survey, write to the senior author: Paul A. Mauger, Ph.D., Department of Psychology, Georgia State University, University Plaza, Atlanta, Georgia 30303.

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